

EXAMINING WHY STRONGER STATES DO NOT USE FORCE AGAINST
WEAKER STATES IN CONFLICT

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Abstract

Realists believe that the distribution of power among states dictates international relationships. In a situation where there is a dispute between an apparently stronger and an apparently weaker state, the stronger state would be expected to use its power, including its military power, to achieve its objective. Yet, this often does not happen. For example, China's navy is far superior to Vietnam's, Laos', and Cambodia's navies. However, China has yet to use force with its military assets to acquire total access to the South China Sea. This paper will investigate why this frequently occurs. Why is this the case?

Four theories may answer this question: 1) perceived reputational costs to a state may deter the use of force, 2) strategic culture may influence a state to hesitate using force outside of its borders, 3) an extensive alliance network will deter an attack from a stronger state, and 4) a history of tenacity and resistance may deter the stronger state from using force. This paper uses four different case studies to test these theories: the Corfu Channel dispute between the United Kingdom and Albania, the Sino-Vietnamese territorial dispute, the Beagle Channel dispute between Argentina and Chile, and the cross-strait dispute between China and Taiwan.

This research paper found that theory 1 best explains why a stronger state may not attack a weaker state from the case studies. The other three theories were found to be inconclusive. This research paper serves as an introduction to further investigate asymmetric power relationships between two states.

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Introduction

Realists believe that the distribution of power among states dictates international relationships. In a situation where there is a dispute between an apparently stronger and an apparently weaker state, the stronger state would be expected to use its power, including its military power, to achieve its objective. Yet, this often does not happen. For example, China's navy is far superior to Vietnam's, Laos', and Cambodia's navies. However, China has yet to use force with its military assets to acquire total access to the South China Sea. This paper will investigate why this frequently occurs.

Although the term is commonly used in the field of international relations, "power" has a variety of definitions. One way is to define power in terms of its effects. Robert A. Dahl defines it simply as the ability of a state to get another state "to do something [it] would otherwise not do."¹ Similarly, Viotti and Kauppi define power as "the means by which a state or another actor wields or can assert actual or potential influence or coercion relative to other states and non-state actors because of the political, geographic, economic and financial, technological, military, social, cultural, or other capabilities it possesses."²

Another approach is to define power in terms of its inputs. Dorel Buse asserts that what power composes on depends on the context of the situation; at times, a state's power draws on one vector, while power in other scenarios is the sum of multiple vectors.³ Although categories of power subcomponents are not universally agreed upon, Buse

¹ Dahl, "The Concept of Power," pp 202-203.

² Viotti and Kauppi, "International Relations Theory," 202.

³ Buse, "The Concept of Power in International Relations," 5.

asserts that the main subcomponents consist of: military capability, economic capability, and technological/information capability.⁴

“Military power” is quite often defined with regard to its inputs. For instance, Veljko Blagojevic defines military power as the elements related to the threat of using force, such as the quantity and quality of weapons, the ability to effectively command units, and the overall morale of the organization.⁵ He argues that military power is one of two components of military capability; military force is the other component of capability. Military force refers to the representation of an organization equipped and trained to utilize its assets; force symbolizes intimidation and destruction.⁶ The combination of military force and power thus creates military capability, which is the “ability to successfully prosecute a variety of a variety of operations against a country’s adversaries.”⁷

Issue in Context

Blagojevic argues that “overwhelming military power provides a greater likelihood for potential opponents to persuade, dissuade, or be forced to postpone action that would harm national interests.”⁸ In other words, he argues that opponents with greater military power are more likely to use it in order to achieve its objectives. With this in mind, it would make sense that, in a confrontation, a militarily superior state would utilize its power advantage to get another state to do something they would not

⁴ Buse, “The Concept of Power in International Relations,” 6.

⁵ Blagojevic, “Military Power in US Foreign Policy – Tradition and Challenges,” 1142.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 1143.

⁸ Ibid., 1142.

normally do. Yet, many stronger states decide to not apply its military power against apparently weaker states in order to obtain its objectives. Why is this?

Four theories potentially explain this phenomenon: 1) stronger states may be deterred from the use of military power by the perceived cost to its reputation, 2) strategic culture influences the likelihood of using of military power, 3) more powerful states may be deterred from attacking less powerful states that have extensive alliance networks, and 4) more powerful states may be deterred from attacking less powerful states that have reputations for tenacity in defense, such as through guerilla resistance.

Through these four theories, this research paper will address the limitations of power in an attempt to answer why stronger states may decide to not utilize its superior military power against weaker states when the two are locked in a dispute.

Literature Review

There are many reasons to why states use force against another state. However, when there is an apparently stronger state and an apparently weaker state, the stronger state may choose to not use force. Existing scholarship may highlight four potential theories explaining why this is the case.

Theory 1: Perceived reputation costs deter the use of military power.

One body of literature suggests that when tensions rise between two states with an apparent imbalance of power, the willingness of the apparently stronger power to utilize military power to coerce the other is influenced by its sensitivity to its international reputation. John Meyers, for instance, asserts that, regardless of the stance on how

significant international reputation is to the state, diplomats and state leaders will act in a manner that protects their own state's reputation.⁹ This is known as the "cult of reputation," where politicians fear the potential loss of reputation and justify their actions to defending their state's reputation.¹⁰ Meyers argues that past actions will contribute to a state's reputation; "standing firm in past crises can signal the strength of a state's military and the importance of a particular commitment."¹¹ Under this assumption, state leaders may also (not) act when in a dispute with a weaker power to protect their reputation. For example, a state may eschew aggressive acts in order to avoid gaining the reputation of being a bully.

In particular, an apparently stronger state may hesitate to use force against an apparently weaker state because it perceived that such action would violate international norms or international law, and thus, damage its own reputation. International relations are heavily reliant on following international norms, or the "standard of appropriate behavior for actors within a given identity."¹² This definition of international norms is commonly utilized with the phrase international law due to their close relations.¹³ International law is the code of guidance for states should behave.¹⁴ Effectively, breaking international law will ostracize one state from the rest of the international community. As a result, this will damage their reputation. Therefore, a state concerned with its reputation may decide to not exercise military power-- especially when such action breaks international law-- in order to protect their reputation.

⁹ Meyers, "Reputation Matters: Evidence from the Korean War," 19.

¹⁰ Tang, "Reputation, Cult of Reputation, and International Conflict," 40.

¹¹ Meyers, "Reputation Matters: Evidence from the Korean War," 34.

¹² Finnemore & Sikkink, "International norm dynamics and political change," 891.

¹³ Zartner, "Internalization of International Law."

¹⁴ Jensen & Miller, "Global Challenge," 86.

Theory 2: The strategic culture of some states discourages them from using force outside its borders.

The decision to exercise military power is also influenced by the state's culture. Scobell argues that strategic culture is a significant dimension in determining the likeliness of one state exercising force on another.¹⁵ Strategic culture is defined as “the fundamental and enduring assumptions about the role of war in human affairs and the efficacy of applying force.”¹⁶ This aligns with Paranjpe's definition of strategic culture, which it refers to “a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behavior, habits, symbols, achievements, and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force.”¹⁷ Strategic culture may engrave an affinity for aggressive behavior, or restraint in utilizing military power when dealing with another country. In the context of China, Scobell argues that national cultures is a key dimension of strategy, and past/present policies are conditioned by the pre-existing philosophy of international relations.¹⁸

Theory 3: More powerful states may be deterred from attacking less powerful states that have extensive alliance networks.

International relations scholars disagree on whether alliances lead to peace or provoke war. Leeds asserts that since the term alliance “represents a heterogeneous category of cooperative security agreements that may have different effects on the

¹⁵ Scobell, “China and Strategic Culture,” 1.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

probability of conflicts,” the debate over alliances leading to peace or war is ill-posed.¹⁹ She argues that alliance commitments impact the likelihood of initiating a dispute, because “different alliances involve different promises to different actors, alliances can have different effects.”²⁰ In other words, alliances can deter the decision to initiate a dispute, or set the conditions to provoke one. In international relations, deterrence is defined as “the act of influencing an adversary’s cost/benefit calculations to prevent it from doing something that you do not want them to do.”²¹ Defensive alliances are created to prevent violent action from another state, and therefore are successful in general deterrence.²² This is because through the alliance, at least one state has the obligation to assist its ally if threatened by a third party.²³

Deterrence theory attracts its share of criticism; one criticism is that alliance network deterrence relies on the assumption that the alliance network will be exercised politically and strategically.²⁴ In other words, an ally will come to the aid of an attacked ally. Part of the effectiveness in defense alliances is the perception it portrays to the aggressor. Jervis asserts, “state actors will view alliances as more unified and durable from outside the alliance in comparison to inside.”²⁵ Whether or not an alliance network provides an apparently weaker state guaranteed military support from its allies, the alliance network increases the military capability by increasing the state’s military force, by Blagojevic’s definition, and thus increases perceived military capability. In essence,

¹⁹ Leeds, “Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes,” 427.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 428.

²¹ Goldman, “Navigating Deterrence: Law, Strategy, and Security in the Twenty-First Century,” 311.

²² Leeds, “Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes,” 437.

²³ *Ibid.*, 432.

²⁴ Bertram, “Strategic Defense and the Western Alliance,” 290.

²⁵ Jervis, “Perception and Misperception in International Politics,” 326.

more powerful states may be deterred from attacking the less powerful state due to a perception of stronger military capability, and fear of retaliation from the totality of the alliance.

Another criticism of deterrence is that it is usually only possible between two “relatively symmetrical [states].”²⁶ This is often studied in the United States-Soviet Union deterrence scenario during the Cold War, especially when comparing the NATO and Soviet Bloc alliance networks.²⁷ Goldman argues, however, that deterrence research implies a “Fourth Wave” is emerging, where mutual deterrence is possible, and regularly occurring, between asymmetric powers.²⁸ This is because contemporary scholarship focuses on military capability as the major factor in deterrence; only recently did military capabilities incorporate the cyber domain. Thus, states with cyberspace dominance may not be viewed as traditionally militarily dominant.²⁹ As a result, Jervis’ argument of perception and misperception may further be amplified depending on the acceptance of the cyber domain as a military battle space.

Theory 4: More powerful states may be deterred from attacking less powerful states that have reputations for tenacity in defense, such as through guerilla resistance.

The last theory involves the lack of willingness to attack an apparently weaker state because of its reputation for tenacity in defense. A state may be reluctant to attack these types of states because it is reluctant to commit to prolonged violence against that

²⁶ Goldman, “Navigating Deterrence: Law, Strategy, and Security in the Twenty-First Century,” 327.

²⁷ Bertram, “Strategic Defense and the Western Alliance,” 295.

²⁸ Goldman, “Navigating Deterrence: Law, Strategy, and Security in the Twenty-First Century,” 317.

²⁹ Bertram, “Strategic Defense and the Western Alliance,” pp 317-318.

state.³⁰ Often times, states prone to tenaciously defending themselves will require a longer commitment, as the dispute could evolve into a war of attrition; if the apparently weaker state adopts guerilla resistance as its main strategy, its operational objective is to wear down the stronger state's conventional force until exhaustion.³¹ Guerilla armies are more often used in asymmetric disputes because the weaker state does not require a large amount of firepower nor training to be successful; their warfare becomes more political in winning hearts and minds of people than to seizing and holding territory.³² Additionally, guerilla armies have the possibility of winning wars against more powerful adversaries because the stakes are higher for the weaker state.³³ If weaker states turn the dispute as a political dispute, they may gain political victory in a military stalemate or defeat.³⁴ Consequently, they are more willing to commit to the costs of war than the more powerful state to achieve its goals.³⁵

Methodology

This research study will use the following four disputes as case studies: 1) the Corfu Channel Incident between the United Kingdom and Albania, 2) the Sino-Vietnamese conflict after 1979, 3) the Beagle Channel conflict between Argentina and Chile, and 4) the cross-strait dispute between China and Taiwan. These case studies were selected based on the following criteria: 1) each case study did not result in a war,

³⁰ Allen & Fordham, "From Melos to Baghdad: Explaining Resistance to Militarized Challenges from More Powerful States," 1027.

³¹ Suter, "The New Era of Warfare."

³² Ibid.

³³ Allen & Fordham, "From Melos to Baghdad: Explaining Resistance to Militarized Challenges from More Powerful States," 1030.

³⁴ Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," 177.

³⁵ Allen & Fordham, "From Melos to Baghdad: Explaining Resistance to Militarized Challenges from More Powerful States," 1030.

or if the case is ongoing, there is no imminent danger of war as a result, 2) the events took place after World War II, and 3) there is an apparently stronger and an apparently weaker state involved in the dispute.

This research paper will determine whether the proposed theories explain the case study outcomes based on the historical evidence.

Discussion

This paper will test four different case studies against the four hypotheses in why a stronger state may not use its military power against a weaker state to achieve its objective, despite being a rationally sound action. Table 1 summarizes the relationship between each case study and theory, while Table 2 summarizes the total number of case studies supporting each theory.

	Theory 1 (Reputation)	Theory 2 (Strategic Culture)	Theory 3 (Alliance Network)	Theory 4 (Resistance)
United Kingdom and Albania	Support	Does Not Support	Does Not Support	Does Not Support
China and Vietnam	Support	Support	Support	Support
Argentina and Chile	Does Not Support	Does not Support	Does Not Support	Does Not Support
China and Taiwan	Support	Support	Support	Support

Table 1
Summary of Relationships between Case Studies and Theories

	Support	Does not Support
Theory 1 (Reputation)	3	1
Theory 2 (Strategic Culture)	2	2
Theory 3	2	2

(Alliance Network)		
Theory 4 (Resistance)	2	2

Table 2
Summary of Total Supporting Case Studies per Theory

One of the biggest limitations to this research study is the small sample size. This study uses only four case studies. In order to generalize the findings, the sample size needs to significantly increase. Additionally, some of the case studies that this research paper includes ongoing disputes between two countries, such as the Chinese-Taiwanese dispute over Taiwan's sovereignty and the Sino-Vietnamese territorial disputes. Without closure of these conflicts, they may change in the future, shifting the findings.

The Corfu Channel Incident – Background Information

After World War II, the United Kingdom was in the process of improving diplomatic relations with Albania; the two states were to send ambassadors to each other right.³⁶ However, the Corfu Channel dispute occurred on May 15, 1946, when Albanian machine guns opened fire on Royal Navy ships occurred 1,500 meters away from Saranda, a coastal town in Albania.³⁷ This further escalated on October 22, 1946, when two Royal Navy ships collided with mines in a considered mine-free zone, causing heavy damages to the two ships with 86 casualties.³⁸ After the two Royal Navy ships collided with the mines, the United Kingdom initiated "Operation Retail," where British minesweepers, ships, and speedboats "swept" through the contested waters for mines.³⁹ The dispute was territorial in nature. The United Kingdom claimed that the channel was

³⁶ Lalaj, "Burning Secrets of the Corfu Channel Incident," 3-4.

³⁷ Munro, "The Case of the Corfu Minefield," 870.

³⁸ Lalaj, "Burning Secrets of the Corfu Channel Incident," 7.

³⁹ Ibid., 8.

an “international highway,” and the Royal Navy initially passed through the channel because it was “the quickest and most convenient route from one place to another” in that region.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Albania claimed that the United Kingdom traveled through waters within the Albanian territory.⁴¹

Ultimately, the Corfu Channel incident did not result in armed conflict. The United Kingdom took a diplomatic approach to the dispute. Although the United Kingdom was postured to use force by bombarding the coastal Albanian positions with artillery, disembark troops, and deploy its aviation assets, Prime Minister Attlee decided to “wait [first] for the [Albanian] government to respond” to the United Kingdom’s offer to negotiate diplomatically.⁴² This was because the United Kingdom still wanted to improve its diplomacy with Albania like beforehand. Consequently, the United Kingdom submitted a formal complaint to the United Nations Security Council in January 1947, which was later forwarded to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to examine the conflict.⁴³ At the very end of the court-led investigation over the dispute, the top-secret document “XCU ONE,” which was official correspondence detailing military plans for Operation Retail, came up to light, and demonstrated that the United Kingdom were preemptively postured for Operation Retail to immediately respond to any Albanian military responses with artillery coverage.⁴⁴ The ICJ ultimately found Albania liable for the damages from the mines on April 9, 1949, and ordered the Albanian government to pay reparations to the United Kingdom.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Munro, *The Case of the Corfu Minefield*, 869.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 870.

⁴² Lalaj, “Burning Secrets of the Corfu Channel Incident,” 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-15.

The Corfu Channel Incident – Analysis

In the Corfu Channel Incident, the United Kingdom is the apparently stronger state(s), while Albania is the apparently weaker state. In light of theory 1, the United Kingdom would have decided to not attack Albania due to the impact it would have on its reputation. This is a plausible explanation for the Corfu Channel incident, evidenced by the United Kingdom's decision to utilize the United Nations Security Council and the ICJ as a mediator in its dispute with Albania. The United Kingdom was one of the founding members in 1945.⁴⁶ If the United Kingdom used military power rather than diplomatic means to resolve the Corfu Channel Incident, it would hurt its reputation as a pioneer of global peace. It would also undermine the United Nations as an organization, since a founding member decided not to use its services for such a dispute. As a permanent member of the Security Council, the United Nations is supposed to mandate use of force during conflict situations; if the United Kingdom used military force instead of attempting to resolve the conflict diplomatically, they would be performing an act of hypocrisy. In essence, there is evidence that theory 1 holds up in the Corfu Channel Incident, and the United Kingdom did not use military power to resolve the dispute to protect its reputation internationally and within the United Nations.

Theory 2 would suggest that the United Kingdom did not attack Albania due to its strategic culture. There is insufficient evidence that suggests if theory 2 holds up in this event. At the time of the incident, the United Kingdom was going through a shift in strategic culture. They were in the middle of balancing its Atlanticism and Europeanism

⁴⁶ “*Member States*,” United Nations, 2020.

priorities, as well as redefining the purpose of the military.⁴⁷ Since the reconceptualization of its strategic culture was ongoing at the time, its contribution to forming the United Nations suggests that the United Kingdom started its shift to improving its diplomatic relationships. Under this light, the United Kingdom could arguably have decided not to attack Albania because they were hesitant in defying its peacekeeping culture. The counter-argument could question exactly where the United Kingdom was at in its strategic culture shift. Although Operation Retail did not result in an outbreak of war, it could be argued as a direct military response to the conflict rather than a diplomatic meeting. Additionally, the later-discovered top-secret document “XCU ONE” demonstrated that the United Kingdom was to use force against Albania.⁴⁸ Ultimately, there is no conclusive evidence to support theory 2.

Theory 3 suggests the United Kingdom would not attack Albania because of the latter’s extensive alliance network. There is also no concrete evidence supporting this claim. Shortly after World War II, the Communist party in Albania took over- the closest ally Albania had was Yugoslavia.⁴⁹ While the Cominform and the Warsaw Pact had yet to be formed until the following years, the diplomatic ties between the Soviet Union and many of the Eastern European states (to include Yugoslavia and Albania) were in the midst of forming at the time of the Corfu Channel Incident.⁵⁰ The Soviet-Albanian relationship was apparently strong; the Soviet Union maintained that “the military-political successes of the Albanian people would have been impossible without the decisive aid given them by the National Liberation Army of [Yugoslavia]... and the

⁴⁷ Miskimmons, A., “Continuity in the Face of Upheaval—British Strategic Culture and the Impact of the Blair Government,” 274.

⁴⁸ Lalaj, “Burning Secrets of the Corfu Channel Incident,” 13.

⁴⁹ Dedijer, “Albania, Soviet Pawn,” 107.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 107-109.

heroic Soviet Army.”⁵¹ Additionally, the Western states acknowledged that Albania was undergoing a rapid “Sovietization” following plenipotentiary minister Chuvakhin’s arrival in 1946.⁵² This is later exemplified with Albania’s admission to the Warsaw Pact in 1955.⁵³ Thus, while it is possible that the United Kingdom did not use military force with Albania because of its alliance network, the United Kingdom never outright showed hesitation over this alliance given its military posture during Operation Retail.

Finally, theory 4 suggests that the United Kingdom did not attack Albania over the Corfu Channel Incident because of Albania’s reputation for tenacious defense. While the theory is appealing, there is still a lack of evidence. During World War II, there were many Albanian resistance groups utilizing guerrilla warfare tactics against the occupying Italian presence.⁵⁴ Between 1943-1944, Albania experienced a civil war between the partisans and non-Communists.⁵⁵ By 1944, Enver Hoxa, one of the leaders of the partisan groups, seized most of Albania, and established political dominance as premier after holding an unopposed Communist-held election.⁵⁶ Clearly, for the five years prior to the Corfu Channel case, Albania repeatedly engaged in armed conflict, often utilizing guerrilla tactics, to pursue and defend a political agenda. Yet, the United Kingdom was planning to use force with its entire force from the British Mediterranean Command, employing artillery, aviation, and ground troop assets.⁵⁷ Thus, while speculation suggests that theory 4 could explain the Corfu Channel Incident, there is no strong evidence of it.

⁵¹ Dedijer, “Albania, Soviet Pawn,” 10.

⁵² Lalaj, “Burning Secrets of the Corfu Channel Incident,” 2.

⁵³ “The Warsaw Pact,” Feb 2020.

⁵⁴ “Albania,” 2020.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Lalaj, “Burning Secrets of the Corfu Channel Incident,” 4.

The Sino-Vietnamese Territory Dispute – Background Information

This case study will examine the Sino-Vietnamese dispute and relations after the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War. In 1979, the two countries had a 27-day war, resulting in 25,000 Chinese casualties and 20,000 Vietnamese casualties.⁵⁸ The reason why the 27-day conflict occurred was because China faced a credibility issue; as one of the major Communist powers, China was pressured to “show that it was not soft and helpless” during international disputes with weaker countries.⁵⁹ The relationship between China and the Vietnam was consequently strained after the dispute despite both countries having a Communist government in power during the Cold War.⁶⁰ Although the two countries fought each other during the short war, the territorial dispute was not resolved. In fact, the territorial rivalry was further exacerbated by the territorial claim disputes over the Paracel and Spratley Islands, in addition to claims in the Gulf of Tonkin throughout the 1980s.⁶¹

China followed the Maoist Doctrine of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” during the later half of the Cold War.⁶² This is mainly “mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, equality, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence” after the Communist Revolution in 1949.⁶³ After the Sino-Vietnamese conflict Beijing leaders, such as Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao put a strong emphasis into improving China’s foreign policy, as they recognized globalization and diplomatic relationships were important to expanding economic growth to China- many diplomatic

⁵⁸ Dreyer, “One Issue Leads to Another: Issue Spirals and the Sino-Vietnamese War,” 297.

⁵⁹ Hung, *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict: Power Play among Communist Neighbors*, 1049.

⁶⁰ Tretiak, “China’s Vietnam War and its Consequences,” 741.

⁶¹ Lanteine, “Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction,” 64-69.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

agreements involved trade and cooperation agreements.⁶⁴ In essence, China became less partial to military force as a method of conflict resolution.

While some territory disputes are currently ongoing, overall relations improved when China and Vietnam achieved full normalization of relations in 1991 without further armed conflict.⁶⁵ Following normalization of relations, the two states reached an agreement through the Land Border Treaty in 2000, creating a Joint Committee for the demarcation to resolve its land disputes.⁶⁶ The Joint Committee eventually came to some solutions for China and Vietnam over a 227km² territory.⁶⁷ Overall, the Sino-Vietnamese relationship shows both signs of improvement and degradation; while the relationship expanded contacts and cooperation amidst various fields, the two states failed to reach total territorial dispute resolution.⁶⁸

The Sino-Vietnamese Territory Dispute – Analysis

In examination of the post-Sino-Vietnamese Conflict territorial dispute, China is the apparently stronger state while Vietnam is the apparent weaker state. Theory 1, then, would suggest that China did not attack Vietnam over the territorial dispute in fear of its impact to Beijing's reputation. There is evidence that supports this theory. China's reputation as a Communist major power was at stake, especially when compared to the Soviet Union. China's goals after the conflict were to build its international prestige and regional political influence.⁶⁹ As a result, China focused on rapid growth in globalization

⁶⁴ Lanteine, "Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction," 12.

⁶⁵ Amer, "Assessing Sino- Vietnamese Relations through the Management of Contentious Issues," 328.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 330-331.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 331.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 331-332.

⁶⁹ Tretiak, "China's Vietnam War and Its Consequences," 740.

in order to rise peacefully in the international system while promoting “greater international harmony.”⁷⁰ Additionally, while the China wanted to maintain its status as an international major power, it also wanted to maintain a diplomatic reputation as well. This is exemplified in its peaceful achievements in signing the Peace and Friendship Treaty with Japan, and ending its estranged relationship with the United States when formally recognized as the People’s Republic.⁷¹ The People’s Republic of China announced its support for the UN to guide international conflict resolution and eventually joined the United Nations in 1971.⁷² The PRC eventually became a “permanent five” member in the UNSC after taking over the Republic of China’s position.⁷³ Given the growing conscientiousness of its “*guoji diwei*,” or international status, China was sensitive to its reputation as a major power. Thus, theory 1 could explain why the China did not attack Vietnam post Sino-Vietnamese Conflict over the territory disputes.

Theory 2 suggests that China did not commit its military in full against Vietnam due to its strategic culture. Evidence of China’s strategic culture supports this explanation. China’s strategic culture is defensive in nature, following both a Confucius/Sun Zi and a Realpolitik influence.⁷⁴ This culture holds the ideas that “peace is precious,” to “never seek hegemony,” and to not attack if “someone doesn’t attack us.”⁷⁵ This is notable when Beijing announced its disdain for violent conflict resolution, supporting the United Nations as the governing entity in conflict resolution.⁷⁶ In light of these ideas, China was not culturally programmed to use force to obtain its national

⁷⁰ Lanteine, “Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction,” 8.

⁷¹ Ibid., 740.

⁷² Ibid., 8-9.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Scobell, “China and Strategic Culture,” 4.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 5-8.

⁷⁶ Lanteine, “Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction,” 8.

interests. Following the “Five Principles,” Jiang Zemin announced China’s initiative on improving relations with former adversaries, to include Vietnam in the 1990s.⁷⁷

Ultimately, since China did not continue using its military power to resolve the territory dispute, but rather preferred diplomatic methods in conflict resolution, theory 2 is feasible as an explanation.

Theory 3 would suggest China withheld military action because of Vietnam’s extensive alliance network. There is evidence that supports theory 3 in the context of this dispute. One of the largest threats to China during this era was the strong Soviet-Vietnamese relationship.⁷⁸ Vietnam aimed to diversify its foreign relations in the late 1970s, but relied on its relationship with the Soviet Union for security and economic gain.⁷⁹ Since the Soviet Union and China competed to be the major Communist Power, the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance posed a direct threat to China if Vietnam were challenged.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1995, Vietnam then established a cooperative relationship with the United States.⁸⁰ China raised concerns when Vietnam announced its membership in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, especially when the United States joined the economic alliance.⁸¹ The two countries normalized their relationship, and partnered on political, economic, and security matters in the Pacific region.⁸² The current day power dynamics pose the United States and China as rivaling major powers.

⁷⁷ Lanteine, “Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction,” 12.

⁷⁸ Amer, “Assessing Sino- Vietnamese Relations through the Management of Contentious Issues,” 323.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 323.

⁸⁰ U.S. Relations With Vietnam - United States Department Of State.

⁸¹ Lanteine, “Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction,” 9.

⁸² Ibid.

Thus, China may not have attacked Vietnam because of Vietnam's alliance networks following the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict.

Finally, theory 4 would suggest that China did not attack Vietnam for its history of tenacious defense. Evidence strongly supports this theory, as Vietnam has a well-deserved reputation in guerrilla warfare and resistance, in addition to successfully winning against apparently stronger aggressors. First, the Viet Minh were known to utilize guerrilla tactics successfully; their most significant victory was at Dien Bien Phu against French occupiers, contributing to Vietnam's independence.⁸³ Later on, North Vietnam and the Viet Cong successfully resisted against the United States and the South Vietnamese Army, eventually unifying the country under one political party.⁸⁴ These two conflicts exemplify Vietnam's reputation for tenacious resistance. During the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict, Vietnam successfully resisted China's military force, and inflicted more casualties to China (25,000 from China vs. 20,000 from Vietnam).⁸⁵ Additionally, Vietnam continued to resist China's influence in Cambodia by maintaining its own presence at the northern border.⁸⁶ With the ongoing resistance, regardless of the scale, China may not have attacked Vietnam over territorial disputes because of its reputation and history of resistance and tenacious defense.

The Beagle Conflict – Background Information

The Beagle Conflict took place in 1978 between Argentina and Chile, and was territorial in nature. Both countries claimed three islands in the mouth of the Beagle

⁸³ Johnson, "The Third Generation of Guerrilla Warfare," 442-443.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 446-447.

⁸⁵ Dreyer, "One Issue Leads to Another: Issue Spirals and the Sino-Vietnamese War," 297.

⁸⁶ Thayer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations: The Interplay of Ideology and National Interest," 514.

Channel.⁸⁷ Argentina argued that the channel curved south to the east of the islands, thus putting them in the Argentina side of the border.⁸⁸ On the other hand, Chile argued that the Channel continued north of the islands, thus belonging to Chile.⁸⁹ The two countries referred the dispute to the ICJ, where the ICJ granted Chile claim to the three islands.⁹⁰ Argentina disagreed with the ruling, and initiated a military buildup in the area in preparation for an invasion to claim mainland territory in addition to the three islands.⁹¹ Under Operation Sovereignty, Argentina postured to seize the three islands in addition to invading and dividing continental Chile.⁹² However, the Vatican reached out to offer its assistance in mediation, to which both Argentina and Chile accepted. Ultimately, the Vatican served as a mediator, and successfully facilitated a peaceful agreement between the two countries.⁹³ In the agreement, Chile received the three islands, but Argentina would receive all maritime rights in 1980.⁹⁴

In 1978, Argentina's foreign policy decisions were affected by the power-sharing and power division arrangements in its military regime.⁹⁵ Not wanting to immediately resort to war, President Videla from Argentina attempted to negotiate with Chile through Argentine emissaries.⁹⁶ However, with a lack of success through the attempted bilateral negotiations, and given the history of the dispute between Argentina and Chile, both states perceived a need for international support in order to resolve the dispute.⁹⁷

⁸⁷ Lindsley, "The Beagle Channel Settlement: Vatican Mediation Resolves a Century-Old Dispute," 436.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Garrett, "The Beagle Channel Dispute: Confrontation and Negotiation in the Southern Cone," 90.

⁹¹ Ibid, 94.

⁹² Aert, "The Beagle Conflict," 310.

⁹³ Ibid., 102.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Gertner, "Autonomy and Negotiation in Foreign Policy: The Beagle Channel Crisis," 57.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 60.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 60-61.

Argentina then agreed to the Chile's proposal to further arbitrate the issue through the ICJ.⁹⁸ Argentina's rationalization in rejecting the ICJ's ruling was from its perception that the court repeatedly misunderstood Argentina's overall argument.⁹⁹ As the situation escalated without effective international arbitration, both countries were preparing for war. Argentina maintained its open preference for bilateral talks, and accepted the Vatican's offer to mediate before its invasion of Chile.¹⁰⁰

The Beagle Conflict – Analysis

Here, the apparently stronger state is Argentina, while the apparently weaker state is Chile. For this dispute, theory 1 suggests that Argentina did not attack Chile in order to protect its international reputation. However, this does not appear to be the case. Initially, both Argentina and Chile mutually agreed to defer the decision of the territory dispute to the ICJ, yet Argentina later disagreed with the ruling. Argentina, while publically acknowledging the ruling to uphold international agreements, they had no intention of to comply with the decision since it damaged vital national interests.¹⁰¹ Argentina built up its military presence in the area, and repeatedly violated Chilean air and maritime space in 1977 and 1978.¹⁰² If Argentina followed through with Operation Sovereignty in 1978, it would hurt its reputation by becoming an unprecedented aggressor, especially after the international community awarded Chile the three islands. Thus, Argentina was willing to hurt its reputation in its invasion if not for the Vatican mediating the dispute. Thus, theory 1 is not supported.

⁹⁸ Gertner, "Autonomy and Negotiation in Foreign Policy: The Beagle Channel Crisis," 98.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 84-85.

¹⁰¹ Garrett, "The Beagle Channel Dispute: Confrontation and Negotiation in the Southern Cone," 93.

¹⁰² Ibid., 94.

Theory 2 suggests that Argentina did not attack Chile because of its strategic culture. However, evidence does not support this theory. Argentinian strategic culture heavily involves nationalism and national pride; Argentina's military nationalism would encourage war to achieve and protect its national interests.¹⁰³ Argentinian strategic culture would also encourage taking what Argentina believes belongs to it.¹⁰⁴ In his Puerto Montt speech, Augusto Pinochet from Chile antagonized Argentina by stating that "Chile had the duty to protect [the Beagle Channel] since it is theirs."¹⁰⁵ Consequently, if Argentina followed its strategic culture, President Jorge Vilela would have outright used force to seize the three islands after Chilean provocation and internal political pressure.¹⁰⁶ Clearly, theory 2 is not applicable to the Beagle Channel Conflict.

Theory 3 suggests that Argentina did not attack Chile because of its alliance network. Evidence does not support this theory. Chile's foreign policy at the time was in the process of shifting due to domestic political changes. At the height of the dispute, the United States supported the new Chilean leader, General Pinochet, on domestic matters following its coup d'état.¹⁰⁷ However, it is unclear whether the United States would support Chile on an international dispute, especially since the United States' government was split on whether it actually supported Pinochet's regime due to its difference in humanitarian values.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, Chile did not rely on the United States to assist in its military affairs.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, while the ICJ awarded Chile claim to the three islands, there were no official commitments from the international community to support

¹⁰³ Lindsley, "The Beagle Channel Settlement: Vatican Mediation Resolves a Century-Old Dispute," 440.

¹⁰⁴ Garrett, "The Beagle Channel Dispute: Confrontation and Negotiation in the Southern Cone," 85.

¹⁰⁵ Gertner, "Autonomy and Negotiation in Foreign Policy: The Beagle Channel Crisis," 74.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

¹⁰⁷ Harmer, Tanya. "Fractious Allies: Chile, the United States, and the Cold War, 1973-76," 109.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰⁹ Gertner, "Autonomy and Negotiation in Foreign Policy: The Beagle Channel Crisis," 76.

of Chile if it were attacked. Argentina knew that the international community would not interfere militarily; major international powers all failed to even criticize Argentina for disregarding the ICJ ruling.¹¹⁰ As a result, theory 3 does not explain this case study.

Theory 4 suggests that Argentina did not attack Chile because of its reputation for resistance. While this theory is plausible at face value, evidence does not support it. Chile indeed has a history of active resistance against oppressive entities. Right before the height of the Beagle Conflict, Chile underwent a coup d'état to overthrow the dictatorship.¹¹¹ Throughout the 1970s, resistance forces utilized guerrilla warfare tactics to defy the militarized dictatorship, resulting in the eventual coup d'état and change of leadership; the new Chilean leadership during the Beagle Conflict was not unfamiliar to resisting oppressive actions.¹¹² Given its reputation for resistance, it would be a feasible explanation for Argentina to avoid outright war in an attempt to evade engaging Chile in a long-term resistance. However, Argentina was postured and ready to execute an attack on Chile. The reason for Argentina recalling its invasion plans during Operation Sovereignty is its preference of a bilateral solution in conjunction with the Vatican's offer to mediate the dispute.

Cross-Straight Dispute (Taiwanese Independence) – Background Information

The Taiwanese independence dispute is currently ongoing, and is between the Republic of China (ROC/Taiwan) and the People's Republic of China (PRC/China).¹¹³ Japan held sovereignty over the Taiwanese territory from 1895 until its defeat in World

¹¹⁰ Gertner, "Autonomy and Negotiation in Foreign Policy: The Beagle Channel Crisis," 76.

¹¹¹ Moya-Raggio, "Arpilleras": Chilean Culture of Resistance,' 277.

¹¹² Loveman, "Military Dictatorship and Political Opposition in Chile, 1973-1986," 5.

¹¹³ Council on Foreign Relations. 2020. *China-Taiwan Relations*.

War II, where Chiang Kai-Shek and the Kuomintang (KMT) military forced Japan to surrender the colony.¹¹⁴ After losing to the Communist Party on mainland China, Chiang Kai-Shek moved the KMT, his political party, to the Taiwan island.¹¹⁵ The official transference of the territory and sovereignty of the Taiwanese colony is unclear; China was not a party to the Peace Treaty of September 1951, nor was any specific party identified to inherit the property in the other post-war treaties.¹¹⁶ As a result, ROC-occupied Taiwan exercised self-determination, arguing that the PRC “never exercised any governmental authority over Taiwan.”¹¹⁷ This directly conflicts with the PRC’s “One China Principle.”¹¹⁸ Despite the sovereignty dispute, Taiwan and China maintain strong economic ties.¹¹⁹ At the present time, over 70 years into the dispute, the outbreak of war over the issue seems unlikely.

China has yet to use military force in reintegrating Taiwan to the mainland politically. Similar to the Sino-Vietnamese case study, China was undergoing foreign policy reform throughout the latter half of the 20th Century. China’s foreign policy focuses on globalization, diplomatic ties to other countries, and peaceful conflict resolution. Although China does not formally recognize Taiwan as a country, both states come to trade agreements with mutual benefits; both countries participate in the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement to remove numerous tariffs, and to open

¹¹⁴ Charney & Prescott, “Resolving Cross-Strait Relations between China and Taiwan,” 458.

¹¹⁵ Council on Foreign Relations. 2020. *China-Taiwan Relations*.

¹¹⁶ Charney & Prescott, “Resolving Cross-Strait Relations between China and Taiwan,” 458-459.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 462.

¹¹⁸ Council on Foreign Relations. 2020. *China-Taiwan Relations*.

¹¹⁹ Council on Foreign Relations. 2020. *China-Taiwan Relations*.

economic ties.¹²⁰ Currently, China views Taiwan as a part of its sovereign state, with a separate government and economy.¹²¹

Cross-Straight Dispute (Taiwanese Independence) – Analysis

The apparently stronger state in this dispute is China (PRC) while the apparently weaker state is Taiwan (ROC). Theory 1 would suggest China has not attacked Taiwan to protect its reputation. Evidence supports this hypothesis. China is aiming to regain its “historical greatness” through establishing technological, economic, military, and political dominance.¹²² Since the latter half of the 20th Century, China wanted to promote diplomatic options for conflict resolution, especially after its acceptance into the United Nations.¹²³ More recently, in order maintain political acceptance, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is structured to further conform to the United Nations’ norms when creating a diplomatic space.¹²⁴ Thus, China cares about how the international community views the country; without international recognition of its success, China could not arguably regain its “historical greatness.” Consequently, China may choose not to attack Taiwan in order to improve its reputation. Thus, theory 1 could support this case study.

Theory 2 suggests that China does not attack Taiwan because of its strategic culture. This theory is also applicable to this dispute. Since Taiwan is not openly threatening China militarily, China would culturally have no reason to use military force against Taiwan; it would prefer maintaining peace. Additionally, under the “One China

¹²⁰ Lanteine, “Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction,” 6.

¹²¹ Ibid., 3.

¹²² Propper & Yann, “The ‘Chinese Dream’: An Analysis of the Belt and Road Initiative,” 4-6.

¹²³ Lanteine, “Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction,” 8-9.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 6.

Principle,” they do not even recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state.¹²⁵ Under this premise, China may not attack Taiwan because they literally view Taiwan to be a part of them. In other words, there is no dispute over territory nor sovereignty, since both entities are a single state. As a result, China may not attack Taiwan because they want to maintain domestic peace. Overall, theory two supports this case study.

Theory 3 suggests that perhaps China avoids military confrontation with Taiwan because of Taiwan’s alliance network. This is also a feasible explanation to the dispute. Taiwan’s biggest international ally is the United States; Taiwan purchases more than 75% of its imported weapons from the United States.¹²⁶ Additionally, the United States openly supports Taiwan, exemplified in signing the Taiwan Relations Act and the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI Act).¹²⁷ This alliance could serve as deterrence for China to attack Taiwan, thus making theory 3 plausible.

Theory 4 suggests the Taiwanese history of tenacious defense deters China from attacking. Evidence moderately supports this theory as well. Taiwan, while not internationally recognized as a sovereign state, has a history of resisting occupying aggressors. Taiwan first resisted Japanese colonization from 1895-1945.¹²⁸ The Taiwanese frequently practiced armed resistance against the Japanese, often through banditry or patriotic partisan warfare.¹²⁹ Similarly, Taiwan has actively resisted China’s political claims over the territory since 1945, demonstrating its belief of autonomy from the mainland. Politically, the ROC has also been resisting the Communist Party since the

¹²⁵ Council on Foreign Relations. 2020. *China-Taiwan Relations*.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ S.1678 - 116Th Congress (2019-2020): Taiwan Allies International Protection And Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act Of 2019.

¹²⁸ Katz, "Governmentality and Its Consequences in Colonial Taiwan: A Case Study of the Ta-pa-ni Incident of 1915," 388.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Chinese Civil War.¹³⁰ In other words, there is literally a history between the ROC and PRC for resistance. In this context, in the event of an armed conflict, Taiwan would expect to pursue a political agenda, while China would pursue a territorial agenda. Therefore, China would be continuing the Civil War, from its perspective, by attacking Taiwan. The fear of continuing the Civil War may deter the PRC from attacking. Thus, it is feasible for theory 4 to apply to the Cross-Straight dispute.

Conclusion

Of the four theories tested, theory 1 best explains why stronger states may not use force against a weaker state based on the analyses, with three case studies supporting the theory and one case study not supporting it. Theory 1 suggests that a stronger state may not attack a weaker state because of the perceived reputational costs to the stronger state. Theories 2-4 were all similar, with two case studies supporting and not supporting each one. As a result, theories 2-4 were considered inconclusive overall in the scope of this research paper.

Given the small sample size in this research paper, future studies with more case studies may further academic understanding of the topic. While theory 1 showed promise in this research paper, the Beagle Channel evidence did not support theory 1. Further study, potentially in the limitations of reputational costs, may be of interest in future studies. Additionally, another topic of interest that arises from this research paper is if the degree of power disparity between two states impacts any of the proposed theories. Moreover, in the Corfu Channel case study, one interesting theory that arose was whether a recent desire to improve diplomacy deters one state from using force.

¹³⁰ Council on Foreign Relations. 2020. *China-Taiwan Relations*.

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